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TITLE: Safer Sex and Unsafe Sex Behavior in a Seminar-based Sample of Midwestern Men Who have Sex with Men (1994 -- 1997)

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Recent studies based in areas of high HIV prevalence have reported increases in unsafe sex among men who have sex with men (MSM), and have attributed this to "behavioral relapse" resulting from HIV/AIDS anti-retroviral therapy. This study examines safer sex behavior, unsafe sexual behavior and contextualized risk behavior from 1994 through 1997 in an area of low-to-moderate HIV prevalence.

METHODS: Midwestern MSM (*N*=725) who participated in a sexual health seminar were surveyed just prior to participation. Data were aggregated annually. Subject demographics were stable across the 4-year period.

RESULTS: Across these baseline surveys, no trend toward increasing risk was found. Fifty-two percent of respondents reported engaging in anal sex during the previous three months, 56% of whom reported not using condoms. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported unprotected anal sex outside of a monogamous, long-term, same serostatus relationship. Two other studies among Midwest MSM - one in gay youth and one in MSM attending a community-based organization (Pride) activity-obtained similar results.

CONCLUSIONS: In this low-moderate HIV prevalence area, the increase in unsafe sex reported from epicenters does not appear to be occurring. We hypothesize that this discrepancy in results reported in epicenters compared with this low prevalence area may be due to changes in the pool of sexually active men who have sex with men in the epicenters, not changes in MSM sexual behavior. If this is true, interventions for men returning to the sexually active MSM pool must address their unique risks.

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